

Family Crimes and Sexual Assault Unit



Dear Parent or Guardian,

When a child makes an allegation of abuse, it can be a difficult and confusing time for you and your family. There are many different people meeting with you, asking questions and giving you information. The Essex County Child Abuse Project was designed to help you and your child understand what will be happening, and to coordinate the agencies involved during the investigation.

The Project works to bring together all professionals involved in the investigation of alleged child abuse for a single videotaped interview, conducted by a child interview specialist. This brochure will provide an overview of the team process. You are welcome to contact the Social Work Investigator or Victim Witness Advocate assigned to your case with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Essex County District Attorney

DSS Investigator:

Victim Witness Advocate:



Essex County Child Abuse Project

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A Guide for Parents and Guardians

*Our First Priority
is the Child*



A Multidisciplinary Approach to the
Investigation of Child Abuse

Frequently Asked Questions

Established in 1986 to ensure a sensitive, multidisciplinary response to child abuse, the Essex County Child Abuse Project, under the direction of the Family Crimes and Sexual Assault Unit, coordinates team investigations of children who allege sexual assault or serious physical abuse. The teams consist of an assistant district attorney, a victim witness advocate, a police officer, a forensic interview specialist and social worker(s) from the Department of Social Services (DSS). The investigations are child-sensitive and conducted by professionals who have experience in the assessment and management of cases involving children.

What is ECCAP?

The Essex County Child Abuse Project or ECCAP is a collaborative effort between the District Attorney's Office and the Department of Social Services (DSS) to coordinate services for you and your family while your child's allegation of abuse is under investigation. In order to ensure the safety and protection of children, the law requires that reports of possible abuse of a child be investigated by DSS. In cases where a crime may have occurred, the District Attorney must be notified. The Project's primary goal is to reduce the number of times your child will need to talk with different professionals. The Project uses a multidisciplinary team approach and is designed to respond to your questions quickly and sensitively during the investigation.

Multidisciplinary Team Members
DSS Investigator
Assistant District Attorney
Local or State Police Officer
Victim Witness Advocate
Forensic Child Interview Specialist



Who is involved in the multidisciplinary team?

The team consists of social workers, police officers, assistant district attorneys, victim witness advocates and a child interview specialist. All of these professionals are sensitive to the difficult and confusing time that you and your child may be experiencing. The social worker must assess the safety and protection of your child. The interview specialist will ask your child questions and be part of the team discussion following the interview. The police officer is from the location where the alleged incident occurred, and along with the assistant district attorney will determine if a crime has been committed and what other investigative steps must be taken. The victim witness advocate will briefly inform you of the course of action the team has recommended. The advocate will be your link to the court system, if and when criminal action is taken. The team's overall goal is to complete the investigation in a child friendly, timely and professional manner.

The team approach is sensitive to a child's individual needs.

Is the team the only way to investigate?

The multidisciplinary team is the most sensitive and comprehensive approach to investigating

children's allegations of abuse. It is, however, voluntary. The advantage of the team is that it can eliminate repeated interviews of your child and provide a coordinated response which can help your family obtain necessary and available services quickly. The team also allows for electronic (videotape) documentation of this part of the investigation. If you do not agree to the team, a DSS investigator will interview your child alone. If DSS supports the claim that your child is making, the report will be forwarded to the District Attorney and the police. You will then be contacted for your child to be interviewed by the District Attorney's Office and the police. It is in your child's best interest to undergo the Interview process once.

What should my child know about the interview?

Children seem to be put at ease by knowing what to expect. It is helpful to inform your child that someone wishes to talk with him or her about what was reported. It is important to reassure your child and give him or her permission to talk freely; however it is equally important not to rehearse with your child or tell your child what to say.

Can I be present with my child or the team during the interview?

It is important for the interviewer to talk with your child alone. If something abusive has happened to your child, it might initially be difficult for your child to talk about this in front of you. If your child discloses abusive incidents it might be upsetting to you. The team members have the responsibility of

observing, assessing and investigating the allegations. The team's focus must be on your child. Therefore you are not permitted to observe the interview. You are encouraged to bring a friend or support person to help you while the interview is taking place. It is understandable that waiting for your child may be difficult.

Will I be able to have a copy of the videotape when I leave that day?

Videotaping investigative interviews is a tool which provides accurate and thorough documentation of what occurs during the interview. The videotape is the property of the District Attorney's Office and can only be released by court order.

What can I expect immediately following the interview?

At the end of the interview, the DSS investigator or the victim witness advocate will inform you about what will happen next. Unless told otherwise, you and your child are free to leave at the end of the interview. The team will meet and develop a plan. Either the victim witness advocate or the DSS investigator will contact you at a later date, usually within a few days, with more detailed information.